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ABSTRACT

The role of the consultant in the superintendent selection process is to assist the board of education in three major areas: in defining the qualifications and characteristics desired in the superintendent, in obtaining a large pool of qualified candidates meeting the defined criteria, and in following procedures that will permit making the best choice from this pool of candidates. In fulfilling these responsibilities, the consultant is charged with helping assure the integrity of the selection process and, in the course of that process, enhancing the dignity, reputation, and image of the board. The consultant specifies the roles appropriate to all parties in the process, including not only the board and the candidates but also the teachers, administrators, students, parents, and citizens involved, as well as the candidates' families and home communities. The consultant is also expected to study the credentials of the candidates, to investigate in depth the qualifications of outstanding candidates, and to recommend a slate of finalists. Finally, the consultant must be knowledgeable concerning the techniques and methodology suitable to making sound choices among superior candidates. (Author/PGD)

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THE ROLE OF CONSULTANTS IN SELECTING A SUPERINTENDENT

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THE ROLE OF CONSULTANTS

IN SELECTING A SUPERINTENDENT

I am the Senior Consultant for NSBA in all of its Superintendency Searches. The NSBA publication, The Executive Educator recently published articles describing consultants as "power brokers" and as racist and sexist. Unfortunately, the article got in the hands of a bright, young, enterprising investigative reporter for the Omaha World-Herald. He asked me to comment on the charges, "racist, sexist, and Good Old Boy". My response was to deny vigorously the racist and sexist charges-- for myself and for the 20 to 30 fellow professionals with whom I have worked. As to the "Good Old Boy" I felt honored to be a part of this mythical organization. I said that if being a "Good Old Boy" means having a great many friends in a profession in which I have worked for more than 45 years-- and having tremendous respect for the superintendents of this country-- and in turn being shown respect by one's peers, then I'm probably a "Good Old Boy." But, if it means allowing friendship or a close personal or professional relationship to influence a recommendation to a Board of Education, then I vigorously deny the description-- for myself and for my colleagues.

Briefly, the role of a consultant is to assist the Board in defining the qualifications and characteristics it desires in its next superintendent of schools; in obtaining a large pool of qualified candidates whose credentials match the desires of the Board; and in assisting in the selection procedures which will result in a wise choice from among the better qualified candidates.

In some greater detail, the role of consultants is:

1. to assure the integrity of the selection process;
2. to enhance the dignity, reputation and image of the Board through a sound selection process;

3. to delineate appropriate roles of parties other than the Board and the candidates--teachers, administrators, students, parents, citizens, the family of the candidate and the community in which the candidate is currently employed;

4. to study the credentials of all candidates; investigate, in depth, the qualifications of the more outstanding candidates and provide the Board with a slate of finalists;

5. to familiarize the Board with the techniques and methodology of selection procedures which result in a sound choice from among superior candidates.

1. The assurance of the integrity of the selection process starts with the integrity, competence and experience of the consultants. Before services are offered and a contract signed, the consultants must be assured that there is a legitimate opening and that the search is an open one. This means that if the Board has a favored local candidate, their credibility will be greater if they go ahead and employ that person and do not engage in a

spurious search. A reputable consultant will damage his own reputation by participating in such a charade.

The integrity of the process demands that objective factors be used in describing the characteristics, and experiences needed. Race and sex have no relevance to candidacy. Contrary to the implications of my earlier remarks, in my opinion most consultants work hard and conscientiously to find well-qualified women and minority candidates for superintendencies. And we have found them, recommended them and they are now performing their duties in a fine manner--as are white males.

Again, contrary to some beliefs, the consultants with whom I have worked and I do not have a stable of candidates. Each search starts out with a clean slate. The position is advertised in the AASA Job Bulletin, the NSBA publications, the state school boards publications, the state administrators publications and sometimes in the New York Times. Hundreds of letters, requesting nominations are written to college and university placement officers, to superintendents, professors of school administration, civil rights leaders, leaders of womens organizations and to all members of the professional staff where the superintendency is open. Any citizen within the community is invited to submit a nomination, in writing, to the President of the Board.

The integrity of the process demands that the confidentiality of all candidates be protected as much as is possible within the framework of the law. It must be understood that when the final slate of candidates has been screened down to two or three candidates, the Board will expect to visit them in their communities and investigate them thoroughly--with no holds barred. Anyone unwilling to undergo careful community visitation and investigation should not apply. Consultants advise Boards to visit the community and talk with a cross-section of Board members and other citizens in the community where the candidate is employed.

2. To enhance the dignity, reputation and image of the Board requires an open, honest search with optimum community participation and optimum information to the media. By "optimum" I mean as much information as possible without jeopardizing the confidentiality of the selection process. By optimum community participation I mean maximum information to the Board about community wishes. This would involve intensive group discussions and public meetings at the outset. It could involve a representative group of citizens meeting with the two or three finalists and giving the Board their individual reactions to candidates--in writing. It should <u>not</u> involve a committee making a recommendation to the Board as to which candidate it

believes the Board should select.

The media should be kept informed. Unless the sunshine laws require it, all names should be kept confidential until the Board has screened the candidates down to the final two or three.

3. The delineation of the appropriate roles of interested parties must be done by the Board. Consultants, who are familiar with pitfalls as well as advantages, can advise. Certainly, parents, teachers, students, administrators, custodial and secretarial personnel as well as citizens at large have an interest in, not only the selection process, but the person who is ultimately chosen for the superintendency. Representatives of all of these parties should have an opportunity to talk with the consultants and help to assess community needs. They should understand the process, the role of consultants and how they can help. They should be asked to describe and give characteristics, to discuss with the consultants their views on the background (education and experience) needed. Public hearings should be held. The consultants should provide the Board with written as well as oral reports of these sessions.

In Board interviews the Board should determine the attitude and the role that members of the candidate's family will play in the final decision. Do they know about community "x" and would they like to live there? Sometimes contractual agreements are reached and then cancelled because a

spouse or child doesn't want to move. Their views should be known prior to signing a contract.

The process of selecting the superintendent is almost as important as the final choice made by the Board. It offers a perfect opportunity for a foresighted Board to draw the entire community into the undertaking. If the Board involves the community thoughtfully and deftly in the process of selecting a superintendent, the result is almost certain to be far less community friction later on, along with a strengthening of community confidence in the Board--and consequently, the its schools.

4. The conscientious review of credentials and backgrounds of all candidates is a job requiring skill and experience. One must learn to read between the lines. Knowing that all candidates are superior, one must be able to determine the more and most superior. Screening candidates after all credentials have been studied takes a full day of the consultants' time.

Before the consultants begin comparing evaluations and eliminating the less well-qualified, they should review in detail the characteristics, qualifications and experiences the Board has indicated it believes are necessary. After the twelve-to-fifteen more desirable candidates have been determined, the names are divided between the consultants for extensive investigation.

Candidates are called to determine their interest in the position and whether they are willing for the consultants to discreetly but intensively investigate their record. Sometimes it is necessary for the consultants to interview candidates. During the time the investigations are taking place the consultants communicate with each other and ultimately agree on the best qualified slate.

5. Informing the Board about the techniques and methodology of the selection process is a procedure which begins with the first conference the consultants have with the Board, and is not concluded until the Board and the new superintendent have signed a contract. Assistance is provided in developing questions to be used in candidate interviews; discussing procedures for physical examinations for final candidates; keeping finalists informed and not screening in candidates who may be no longer interested; withholding the job offer until all information is available; and finally, informing the Board about contractual considerations. Sometimes the Board may wish to have consultants secure additional information about a candidate before a contract is signed.

The most rewarding moment comes to consultants when upon completion of a search, a Board President says, "You really listened to what we said we were looking for. We could have been happy with any one of the six."